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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001989

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11-18-13

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: President, PM agree to appoint committee to deal with "national issues"

Refs: (A) Colombo/OpsCenter 11/18/03 telecon

- (B) Colombo 1984, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

11. (SBU) On November 18, President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe met to discuss possible ways out of the political morass precipitated by the President's November 4 takeover of three key ministries and suspension of Parliament. This was their second face-to-face meeting since the crisis began (see Ref B). According to a joint press statement issued after today's meeting (see Para three for the text), the President and PM agreed to appoint a "Committee of Officials" to work out arrangements whereby the President and PM could work together on "important national issues." The "Committee of Officials" mentioned in the joint statement appears to be related to the "consultative" or "peace" committee discussed by both the President and the PM in their separate recent meetings with the Ambassador (see Ref B). The statement also mentions that the President and the PM are slated to meet again in two weeks. Economic Reform Minister Milinda Moragoda told the Ambassador later in the day that the committee will have four members: Bradman Weerakoon and United National Party (UNP) chairman Malik Samarawickreme will represent the PM; Mano Tittawella and W.J.S. Karunaratne will be across the table.

12. (C) COMMENT: The two parties' agreement to appoint a committee to work on important issues appears on the face of it to be a positive sign, as is the announcement that the President and the PM plan to meet again in two weeks. It seems as if both sides are trying to ratchet down temperatures, which is certainly good news. That said, with Parliament scheduled to meet tomorrow (November 19) for the first time since it was suspended on November 4, it is possible that intra-party friction could quickly spike again. In addition, although the two sides may have agreed to a mechanism for discussing their differences, they do not seem closer to actually solving who controls what ministries and how to handle the peace process. END COMMENT.

13. (U) The statement, which was issued in the names of the Secretaries to the President, W.J.S. Karunaratne, and the PM, Bradman Weerakoon, reads as follows:

BEGIN TEXT

The President and the Prime Minister met today at the President's House and discussed in depth several issues on which they could work together. The discussion commenced at 11.15 am and concluded at 12.45 pm. The President and Prime Minister were assisted by W.J.S. Karunaratne, Secretary to the President, Bradman Weerakoon, Secretary to the Prime Minister and Mano Tittawella, Senior Adviser to the President and Senior Director General to the President's Office.

A Committee of Officials was appointed to work out the details of future working arrangements under which the President and the Prime Minister could work together on these important national issues. It was also decided that the President and the Prime Minister would meet again in two weeks to move the process forward.

Secretary/ President Secretary/Prime Minister 18th

SIPDIS

November 2003

END TEXT.

14. (U) Minimize considered.

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